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ABSTRACT

The need to verify the competencies purported to be developed by individuals completing a program designed to prepare supervisors of special education led to surveying 29 Pennsylvania Directors of Special Education who were asked to rate successful first year supervisors of special education on 40 competencies. Results indicated the eight roles stressed in the preparation program were rated by the directors as present in successful first year supervisors of special education; directors agreed that the 40 competencies were demonstrable by the successful supervisors; and the roles and competencies rated highest reflect the view that the supervisor serves primarily as a resource consultant to teachers of exceptional children rather than as an administrator. The three competencies rated highest by the directors were monitoring implementation of individualized education programs, planning staff improvement, and serving as resource to staff. (Author/DB)

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Competencies of First-Line Supervisors of Special Education

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Abstract

The need to verify the competencies purported to be developed by individuals completing a program designed to prepare supervisors of special education resulted in this study. A survey instrument was developed and sent to employers who were asked to rate successful first year supervisors of special education on 40 competencies. The results suggest that the competencies involved are demonstrable and support the view that first-line supervisors of special education serve primarily as resource consultants to teachers of exceptional children.

Competencies of First-Line Supervisors of Special Education

With the passage of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the need for the improvement of instruction provided handicapped children became a national concern. While the classroom teacher is the major ingredient in the delivery of instruction to children, supervisory personnel traditionally have been employed by the schools to aid in the improvement of instruction (Cogan, 1973; Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1971). However, until relatively recently, supervisory personnel employed by the schools frequently completed certification programs void in content related to special education and/or handicapped children (Stile and Pettibone, 1980).

With the mandates of PL 94-142, there is an increased need for supervisory personnel who are trained in special education to assist the classroom teacher. "Gone are the days when practically anyone with a teaching or administrative credential in any area was considered competent to supervise special education programs" (Whitworth and Hatley, 1979, p. 304). In a recent study of leadership personnel in special education, Whitworth and Hatley found: (a) an increase in the number of states requiring certification for special education leadership personnel from 12 in 1970 to 30 in 1979 and (b) an increase in the number of states that distinguish among leadership personnel and issue both administrative and supervisory certificates (1979).

Pennsylvania is one of only 15 states that requires special education supervisors to possess certification in special education supervision (Whitsworth and Hatley, 1979). Since 1977, individuals seeking certification to work as a supervisor in the public schools of Pennsylvania must meet three criteria: (a) completion of an approved supervisory certification program, (b) possession of a master's degree in the field in which the

certificate is requested, and (c) five years of professional experience in the area for which supervisory certification is sought (Manchester, Note 1).

The Department of Special Education, Slippery Rock State College (SRSC) initiated a training program to prepare supervisors of special education in 1973. However, full PDE program approval did not occur until December 1977.

The SRSC program for preparation of supervisory personnel is based upon a "Supervisory Process Model" developed by the Department of Special Education following an extensive review of the literature and survey of practitioners (Stramiello, Note 2). The model subsequently was modified by an "Ad Hoc Committee on Supervision" created to develop the program. The model views supervision as consisting of eight specific roles and their corresponding functions:

Major Role	Major Function
Consultation	Improve Teaching
Administration	Prosecute Requirements
Personnel	Develop Staff
Leadership	Initiate Change
Research	Solve Problems
Evaluation	Measure Program Effectiveness
Methods/Materials	Plan Instructional Strategies
Curriculum	Improve Program

The SRSC program was designed to prepare "first-line" supervisors who would possess those competencies required to perform the nine major roles and their corresponding functions contained in the Supervisory Process Model, and, thereby, work directly and cooperatively with teachers in the improvement of instruction.

The present study was undertaken to determine the extent to which competencies purported to be developed by individuals who complete the

SRSC Supervisor of Special Education Training Program are exhibited by individuals perceived by their employers as successful first year supervisors of special education

Method

A survey instrument was constructed employing 40 competencies derived directly from the printed curriculum developed for the training of supervisors of special Education (Walker and Myers, Note 3). The instrument, "First Year Supervisor Competency Rating Scale", consisted of five competencies for each of the eight roles/functions included in the SRSC Supervisory Process Model. The respondents were asked to rate successful first year supervisors of special education on each of the 40 competencies using a five point scale ranging from "strongly agree" (1 pt) to "strongly disagree" (5 pts). An intermediate category "undecided (3 pts) also was included. Colleagues familiar with the SRSC curriculum reviewed the instrument for clarity and content validity. The final version of the instrument was constructed based on their suggestions.

The subjects of this study consisted of the Directors of Special Education employed by the 29 Intermediate Units (IU) in Pennsylvania. The IUs are the major employers of first line supervisors of special education in Pennsylvania. The Directors are administrative personnel who are employed by the IU to manage the special education programs conducted within the IUs. Each of the 29 Directors was contacted and asked to participate in the study. The task assigned to them was to "..rate the competencies demonstrated by successful first year supervisors of special education employed..." by their administrative unit. The Directors were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed that each of the 40 competencies is present in successful first year supervisors of

Method (continued)

special education. They also were encouraged to add any competencies they thought are needed by first year supervisors other than the ones listed on the survey instrument.

The initial mailing date to the Directors was July 1, 1979. Two additional contacts were made with the last attempt to obtain a response dated September 19, 1979. Of the 29 individuals who were employed as IU Directors of Special Education in Pennsylvania, 28 (96.6%) responded by returning completed survey instruments.

Results

The mean rating scores were determined for each of the eight supervisory roles as well as each of the 40 specific competencies. The mean scores of the respondents for the eight roles were all in the strongly agree and agree categories. (See Table 1). None of the mean ratings fell into the uncertain or disagree/strongly disagree categories. The relatively high ratings for the roles of Curriculum and Methods/Materials and relatively low

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Supervisory Roles
N=28

Rank	Role	$\bar{X}$ Rating
1	Curriculum (Q-31 to 35)	1.59
2	Methods/Materials (Q-36 to 40)	1.71
3	Personnel (Q-16 to 20)	1.79
4	Evaluation (Q-26 to 30)	1.80
5	Consultation (Q-11 to 15)	1.83
6	Leadership (Q-6 to 10)	1.99
7	Administration (Q-1 to 5)	2.14
8	Research (Q-21 to 25)	2.22

ratings for the roles of Administration and Research suggest that the

Results (continued)

Directors of Special Education probably subscribe to the view of the supervisor as one who assists teachers improve instruction rather than as one who engages in more traditional managerial functions. However, it appears obvious that the Directors view all eight roles as ones performed by successful first year supervisors.

The mean ratings of the 40 competencies are listed in Table 2. It is interesting to note that all but one of the competencies was given a rating of either strongly agree or agree by the Directors. Only one competency, (Q-1: prepare educational specifications for school facilities), was rated in the undecided category. None of the competencies received a mean rating of disagree or strongly disagree. This finding suggests that the Directors view the competencies as ones which are demonstrable by successful first year supervisors of special education. The one competency on which the Directors were uncertain (Q-1) probably reflects their ambivalence toward this competency either as one demonstrated by first year supervisors or as one belonging to first-line supervisory personnel.

An inspection of Table 2 fails to uncover any obvious pattern to the ratings. Arbitrarily focusing attention on the competencies ranked in the top ten finds three categorized as belonging to the supervisory role of Curriculum (Q-34, Q-33, Q-35), two as Personnel (Q-16, Q-20), and one each as Leadership (Q-7), Administration (Q-4), Evaluation (Q-26), Methods/Materials (Q-36), and Consultation (Q-11). None of the competencies among the ten top ranked is categorized as Research. With the exception of Q-20 (demonstrate self confidence in working with staff) the top ten ranked competencies appear to be directly related to training rather than to personal characteristics of the individuals who became supervisors. Not suprisingly, the highest ranked (Q-34: monitor the implementation of

Table 2
Mean Ratings of Competencies Demonstrated by Successful First Year Supervisors of Special Education as Perceived by Directors of Special Education
(N=28)

Competency[a]	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank
Monitor Implementation of IEP's (Q-34)	1.29	.64	1
Plan Staff Improvement (Q-16)	1.32	.47	2
Serve as Resource to Staff (Q-7)	1.32	.66	3
Describe Legal Basis (Q-4)	1.36	.47	4
Demonstrate Self-Confidence (Q-20)	1.36	.54	5
Assist in Development of IEP's (Q-33)	1.39	.68	6
Identify Curriculum Resources (Q-35)	1.43	.73	7
Measure Teacher Effectiveness (Q-26)	1.46	.74	8
Inventory Teaching Strategies (Q-36)	1.50	.50	9
Conduct Supervisory Conference (Q-11)	1.57	.57	10
Conduct Needs Assessment (Q-30)	1.61	.67	11
Use of Instructional Materials (Q-39)	1.64	.72	12
Develop Criteria for Materials (Q-37)	1.68	.54	13
Demonstrate Resources for Professional Growth (Q-15)	1.74	.75	14
Prepare Educational Prescriptions (Q-12)	1.75	.91	15
Implement Supervisory Model (Q-6)	1.75	1.06	16
Utilization of Community Resources (Q-40)	1.79	.61	17
Describe Curriculum Development (Q-31)	1.79	.66	18
Compare Various Staffing Patterns (Q-19)	1.79	.77	19
Plan for Program Evaluation (Q-27)	1.79	.81	20
Use Research Sources (Q-22)	1.86	.63	21
Apply Interviewing Techniques (Q-17)	1.86	.78	22
Make Decisions (Q-2)	1.93	.65	23
Provide Consultation to Community (Q-13)	1.96	.58	24
Construct Time-Management Log (Q-3)	1.96	.79	25.5
Use IMC Network (Q-38)	1.96	.79	25.5
Describe Program Evaluation Models (Q-28)	2.00	.84	27
Delineate Regulations (Q-32)	2.04	.55	28

Table 2
Mean Ratings of Competencies Demonstrated by Successful First Year Supervisors of Special Education as Perceived by Directors of Special Education (continued)
(N=28)

Competency[a]	$\bar{X}$	SD	Rank
Recognize Need for Research (Q-25)	2.04	.81	29
Advocate for Exceptional Persons (Q-9)	2.07	.85	30
Assess School-Community Relations (Q-29)	2.14	.65	31
Describe Effective Consultation (Q-14)	2.14	.88	32
Interpret Results of Research (Q-24)	2.18	.66	33
Inventory Community Resources (Q-8)	2.18	.80	34
Participate in Research (Q-21)	2.29	.83	35
Demonstrate Understanding of Financial Resources (Q-5)	2.29	.95	36
Recruit Staff (Q-18)	2.64	1.05	37
Develop Public Relations Program (Q-10)	2.67	1.01	38
Design Research Proposal (Q-23)	2.85	.76	39
Prepare Educational Specifications (Q-1)	3.14	.96	40

[a]All competencies are abbreviated from longer versions included on the survey instrument.

Results (continued)

IEP's for exceptional pupils) competencies probably reflect the importance Directors presently place on the need to comply with PL 94-142.

An inspection of the competencies ranked in the lowest ten, finds three classified as belonging to the supervisor's role of Research (Q-23, Q-21, Q-24), two as Leadership (Q-8, Q-10), and two as Administration (Q-5, Q-1), and one each classified as Personnel (Q-18), Consultation (Q-14) and Evaluation (Q-29). None of the competencies classified as Curriculum or Methods/Materials are among the ten bottom ranked competencies. An assessment of these competencies suggests that the relative low ratings may be a reflection of the Director's priorities for supervisory personnel. None of the ten competencies involves direct "hands on" skills with teachers or exceptional pupils but rather involves activities which border on ones that might be perceived as the responsibility of administrative personnel.

Only a few of the Directors added any comments related to additional competencies needed by first-line supervisors of special education. Specific competencies suggested by one or more Directors included "ability to prepare reports required by state and federal agencies", "plan effective use of teacher aides", "implement interactions with regular teachers", and "demonstrate understanding of normal development".

Conclusions

Although no attempt was made to analyze the data other than to obtain mean ratings, several conclusions seem reasonable.

1. The eight roles included in the SRSC Supervisory Process Model are rated by Directors of Special Education as present in successful first year supervisors of special education.
2. Of the 40 specific competencies included in the Model, the Directors either agreed or strongly agreed that they are demonstrable by successful

Conclusion (continued)

first year supervisors of special education.

3. The roles and competencies rated highest by Directors of special education reflect support for the view of the first-line supervisor of special education as one who serves primarily as a resource consultant to teachers of exceptional children rather than as an administrator who's primary roles are managerial.

Reference Notes

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